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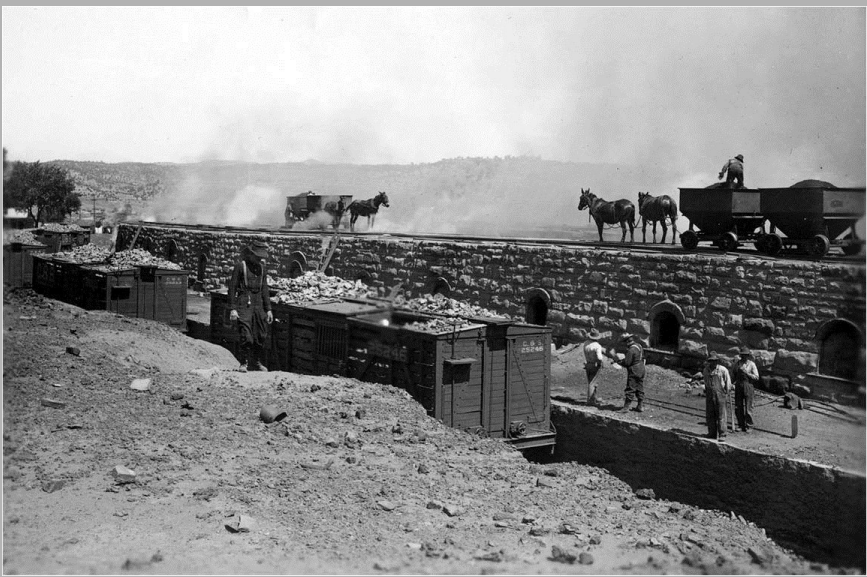
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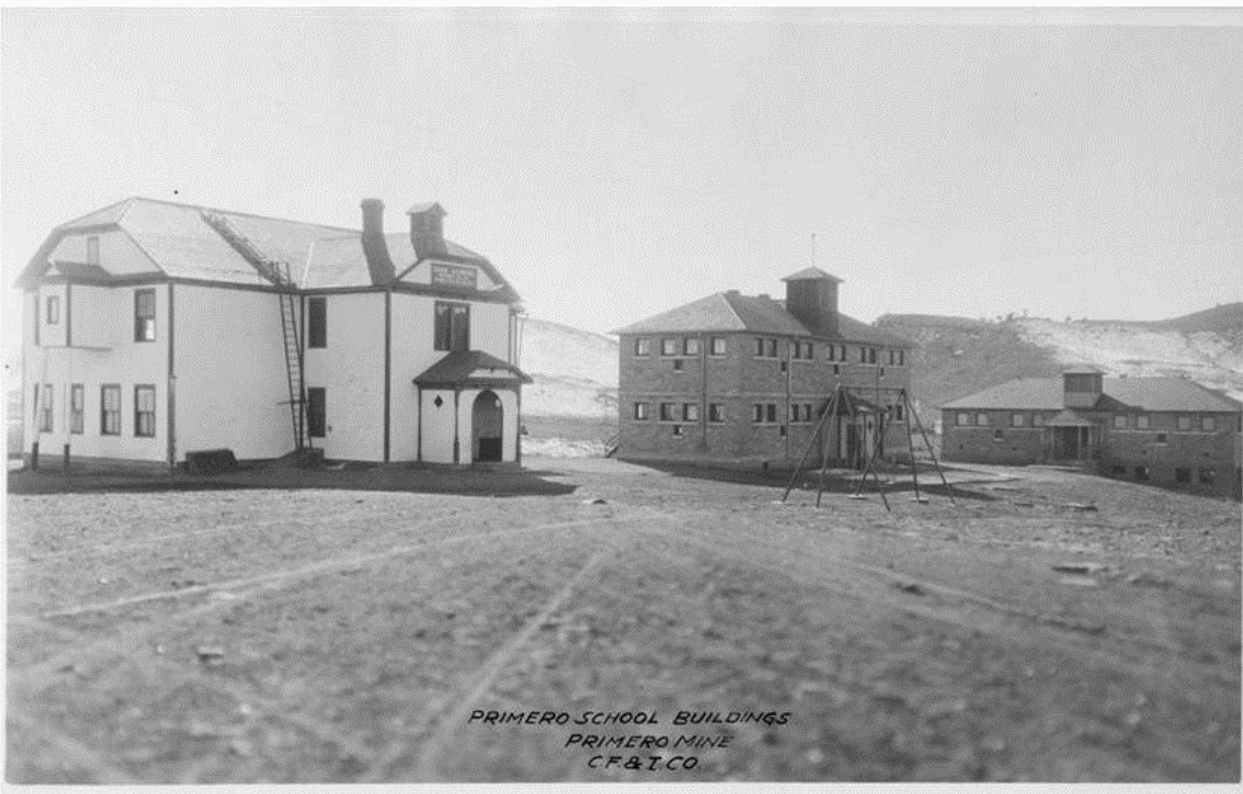
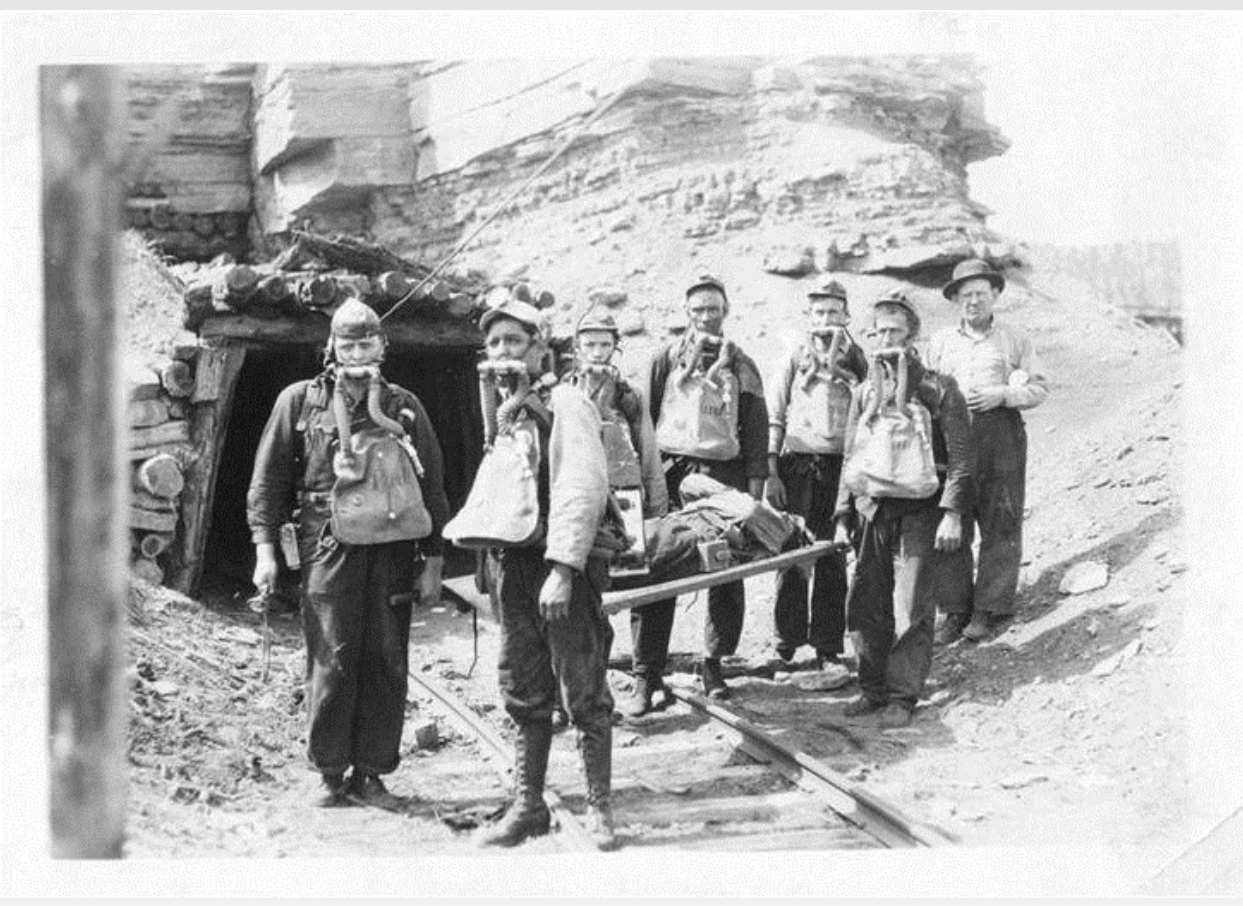
Sixteen Tons: Appraising the Records of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company

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Abstract



The Colorado Fuel & Iron Archives began life as a collection of 20,000 cubic feet of records housed in ten+ separate buildings which have been abandoned on the grounds of a largely inactive steel mill in Pueblo, Colorado. The materials document the life, growth and death of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, a giant steel and mining corporation that played a very important role in the industrialization of the Rocky Mountain West. Faced with this mountain of business records, the newly hired archivists of the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company needed to come up with an appraisal strategy. A combination of literature review, consultation with industry and business archives specialists, and perseverance yielded a workable methodology which enabled them to reduce the collection to a more manageable size without sacrificing the content of the collection.



Methodology

Literature review: One of the first and most important steps we took in developing a strategy to process the collection was to read as much as possible about business records, and particularly, on their appraisal. We also learned as much as we could about the steel and mining industries, and specifically about CF&I. We talked to former employees, and had them explain technological processes to us; we toured the steel plant and visited old mining towns.

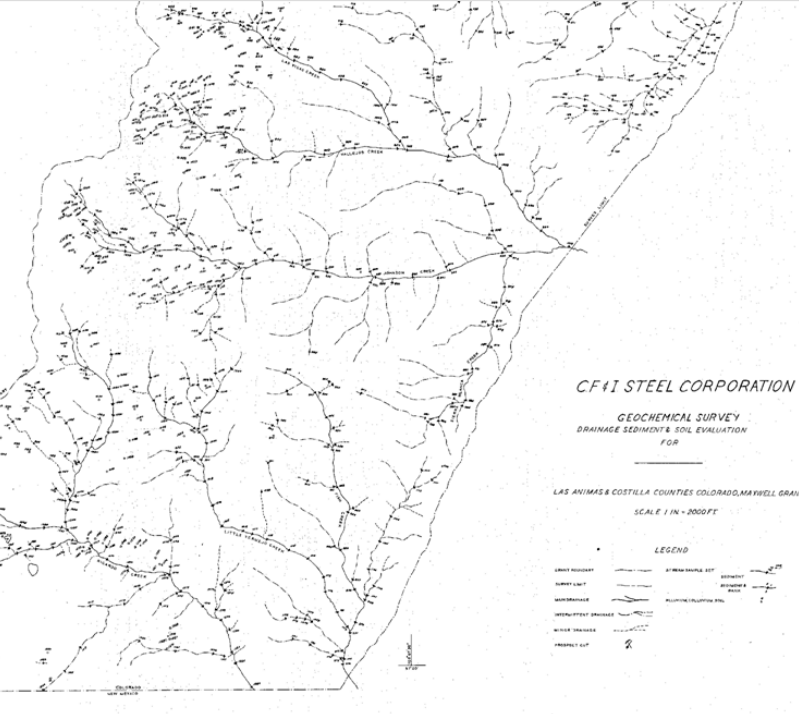


Electronic discussion group: To assist with the appraisal of this large and complex industrial archive, we decided to set up an electronic discussion group on Yahoo (cfiarchives - CFI Archives Appraisal Group) and recruited historians and archivists with expertise in the area of industrial records.



Survey: Since the collection was physically scattered throughout ten+ buildings, a major first step in sorting the material into subgroups involved bringing together like materials in the main CF&I Administrative Building. A room by room survey of all the buildings was carried out and records were designated for retention or deaccessioning. Those records considered archival were assigned a subgroup designation.

Retention Schedule: After careful examination of the collection, and consultation with our advisors, we developed a retention schedule which, after review by the Board of Trustees, made deaccessioning decisions which reduced the size of the collection from 20,000 c.f. to about 5,000 c.f. Among the deaccessioned materials were lengthy runs of routine materials such as heat logs, tonnage reports, invoices, orders, requisition requests, and payroll records. Record retained included industrial relations records, drill hole logs, maps, geochemical surveys, land and water reports, personnel records and other materials which document the essential operations of the company.



Institutional Background



The CF&I Archives have been in jeopardy of being lost, destroyed and damaged since 1990 when the company filed for bankruptcy and most of the administrative buildings were abandoned. When the records came into the possession of BHS, they were housed in ten+ buildings, both in the Administrative office complex, and in various places in the steel mill.

The original storage conditions put some of the CF&I Archives at considerable risk, and measures were taken to prevent further damage. For instance, water was seeping in through the walls in a couple of Annex basement rooms where records were housed. Upon discovery of these conditions, the records were examined for water damage and the growth of mold, and damaged/contaminated records were quarantined. The rest of the records were rehoused in acid-free boxes and moved to a location above ground. Records were also moved from underneath water pipes and relocated in safe places. One of the biggest physical challenges for the staff was the mission of carrying hundreds of ledgers up a ten foot ladder from an area (rejoicing in the name of "The Pit") which was partially exposed to the elements. Staff dislodged mice from their nest in a box of records and wrangled newborn kittens and confused pigeons who had found their way into the building and couldn't find their way out. Entryways were sealed, windows repaired, and the building was made



as airtight as possible. Microfilm was removed from file cabinets rusting due to storage underneath burst water pipes. Irreplaceable land records (which provide an invaluable picture of the growth of Colorado) were located on the first floor of the dilapidated medical dispensary, which was infested with insects. These records were debugged, reboxed and moved to the Administrative Building. In many areas, records had simply been thrown on the floor, and dirt and dust was everywhere. Acidic papers and oversize materials were frequently stored side-by-side with fragile documents and many were crumpled, bent, folded, stapled and taped. There had also been break-ins at a couple of the buildings, due to lack of proper security.



Conclusion

The use of a variety of appraisal methods to revisit the massive collection of business and industrial records proved essential in gaining intellectual control. Once an inventory was complete, and the archivists understood the operations of the company, the development of a retention schedule that could be retroactively applied to the collection was invaluable. It allowed for record series to be quickly identified and streamlined the final disposition of the materials. The process laid the framework for arrangement and description, by informing the archivists as to which parts of the collection required detailed processing and when MPLP was appropriate. The appraisal process also assisted with preservation of the collection, by preventing the waste of resources on materials that were deemed non-permanent. Archival supplies and rehousing were reserved for the valuable materials. Additionally, the entire appraisal process was an educational enterprise allowing the archivists to instruct the organization's board of trustees on the deaccessioning process. Clearly all records are not created equal, and the archivists were able to demonstrate this to the board.

